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ABSTRACT

Practical suggestions for effective lecturing are offered and what educational objectives are accomplishable by means of lecturing are discussed in this guide. The following topics are addressed: effective lecture delivery, managing lecture content, and motivating listeners. Ways to vary the stimuli and making a point in lecture delivery are considered, including using humor, mixed media, and questions. To effectively manage lecture content, the following suggestions are made: adopt some organizational scheme for each lecture, make the organization of the lecture explicit, and provide students with a lecture outline. Students may be motivated if the teacher links course material to real-life situations and makes explicit the interrelationships in course content. Factors useful for maintaining audience attention are listed, and the importance of teacher enthusiasm is emphasized. (SW)

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ASPECTS OF LECTURING

A Practical Guide for IDEA Users

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Introduction to "Practical Guides"

A major flaw with most student evaluations of teaching, or any evaluation of teaching is that, having pointed out where there might be room for improvement, they have little to offer about possible means of improvement. These "practical guides" are an attempt to remedy that situation for IDEA users. Typically, the IDEA Report identifies specific teaching methods needing improvement which are related to the instructor's course objectives where the students reported average progress or less. These practical guides will make concrete suggestions about ways to improve teaching. Although the suggestions presented in these guides are written in the context of the IDEA System, most of the suggestions are taken from the general literature on college teaching and so should be of help to any college teacher seeking to improve upon a given teaching technique.

A basic assumption which underlies these guides, and the IDEA System as well, is the belief that there is no SINGLE, CORRECT way to teach. The effectiveness of one's teaching depends upon a multitude of factors including: the objectives of the particular course; the teaching style and other traits of the instructor; and such student characteristics as learning ability, background, motivation to take the course, educational goals, etc. Because of this, these guides will suggest various alternatives and leave to the individual instructor the selection of those which seem most promising.

It is strongly recommended that each instructor employ a variety of methods to obtain feedback concerning the relative success of the alternatives attempted. We particularly recommend that you discuss your attempts to improve your teaching directly with your students. They are, after all, the people who are supposed to be learning.

William E. Cashin
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ASPECTS OF LECTURING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR IDEA USERS

Which aspects of lecturing will be considered in this Guide? While other issues will be touched upon, several "Lecture" items on the IDEA Report will serve to set limits on an otherwise open-ended topic.

The IDEA user will sympathize with our search for parsimony, recognizing that many of the IDEA teaching method items[1] must be considered in a discussion of lecturing. Of the twenty teaching method items, the following have been selected as those appropriate for this Guide:

Item No.

4. Seemed enthusiastic about the subject matter.

7. Spoke with expressiveness and variety in tone of voice.[2]

8. Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter.

9. Made presentations which were dry and dull.[2]

10. Made it clear how each topic fit into the source.

14. Summarized the material in a manner which aided retention.[2]

17. Explained course material clearly and explanations were to the point.[2]

18. Related course materials to real-life situations.

Even though this Guide is intended to offer practical suggestions for, rather than to raise questions of the effectiveness of lecturing, we will briefly address the question "What's a lecture for?", that is, "What educational objectives are more or less accomplishable by means of lecturing?"

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[1]Given the prevalence of lecturing as the preferred method of instruction by American college teachers, it is not surprising that many items associated with that teaching approach are correlated highly with student progress ratings on IDEA objectives.

[2]These items are most directly associated with lecturing. The others, while they may relate to other methods of instruction, are likewise appropriate to a discussion of lecturing.

The literature on the merits of lecturing is extensive, although not conclusive. Recent findings are summarized here. The lecture method is suitable when:

a) the basic purpose of the instruction is to disseminate information,

b) the material is not available elsewhere,

c) material must be organized and presented in a particular way for a specific group,

d) it is necessary to arouse interest in the subject,

e) the material need be remembered only for a short time,

f) it is necessary to provide an introduction to an area or give directions to students who will be instructed by other teaching methods.

(Gage and Berliner, 1975)

The converse of many of the attributes listed above imply conditions under which lecturing is inappropriate. In addition, the literature suggests that the lecture method is less effective than other methods for:

a) achieving higher-level cognitive objectives like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation,

b) when students are average or below average in academic preparation or intelligence.

(McKeachie, 1967; Bligh, 1972)

We encourage you to consider the kinds of course objectives which you are trying to achieve. Have you selected those which are most compatible with the lecture method? Are there other methods which might be used to supplement lecturing to achieve those of your important objectives which don't lend themselves particularly well to lecturing?

Your answers to these questions will likely be influenced by your assessment of your own preferred method of instruction; will be based, perhaps, on administrative considerations of cost-effectiveness of lecturing versus other approaches; or, perhaps, on the availability of time and resources to adopt teaching procedures other than lecturing.

While it has been demonstrated that "lecturing" can accomplish only a small portion of objectives appropriate for "teaching," it is nevertheless an approach to instruction which college teachers practice with great regularity. Unfortunately, it is usually not "practiced" in the sense of the exercise of and experimentation with techniques for presenting information (techniques derived from a theoretical understanding of factors which likely affect the kind of learning possible from lecturing). Rather, too often, teachers mistakenly conceive the criteria of a good lecture on a topic to be the criteria applied to written scholarly discourse on that subject, disregarding the differences of media and the ways in which

each medium affects student learning. In line with this, Davis says "For most college teachers, lecturing is like throwing the shot: they spend all their time getting together a very heavy message and then just fling it." (Davis, 1976, p.57)

As this is a practical guide, we will not dwell on learning theories and the psychological experimentation with memory which underlies suggestions for lecturing. You may be assured, however, that while there continues to be a debate among learning theorists as to how human beings learn, factors which affect memory, and the like, the suggestions here are grounded either in empirical research which grows out of learning theory or are logically consistent with such theories. (For a full discussion of research evidence, see Bligh, 1974.)

To return to the IDEA items . . . the following portion of this Guide will be organized around aspects of lecturing suggested by the IDEA items. Comments will be made on the items and, drawing on the literature, other suggestions and commentary will be made to elaborate on each aspect. For the purposes of this paper, we conceive of these IDEA items as falling into the following categories:[3]

I. Effective lecture delivery

7. Spoke with expressiveness and variety in tone of voice.

9. Made presentations which were dry and dull.

17. Explained course material clearly, and explanations were to the point.

II. Managing lecture content

10. Made it clear how each topic fit into the course.

14. Summarized material in a manner which aided retention.

III. Motivating listeners

18. Related course material to real-life situations.

8. Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter.

4. Seemed enthusiastic about the subject matter.

I. Effective Lecture Delivery

7. Spoke with expressiveness and variety in tone of voice.

9. Made presentations which were dry and dull

17. Explained course material clearly, and explanations were to the point.

This section will be divided into two subsections: A) varying the stimuli, which refers to IDEA Items 7 and 9, and B) making a point, which uses Item 17 as its starting point.

A. Varying the Stimuli

Writers on lecturing frequently assert that the effective lecture is one which is likely characterized by variety and surprise. They have found that the lecturer who uses several means for engaging students' attention on the matters before them are effective in communicating their message.

Those who use a lecture-demonstration approach to pedagogy might wish to linger for a few moments on this section, rather than assuming that their demonstrations provide the surprise which is absent in a colleague's "lecture-only" approach. The following "educational research" evidence may be apropos. After observing a colleague in a science department use the lecture-demonstration approach, this writer made the following observation: by ending each of his classes with a demonstration (one usually elaborately planned to give spectacular visual reference to the lecture's concepts) he was inadvertently saying to the students, "This class is over." To demonstrate the effect of his habit of end-of-class demonstrations, he agreed to introduce a demonstration two-thirds of the way through his next class session. We estimated that forty percent of his students sat through the remaining fifteen minutes of his class with their coats on and with books neatly piled on their desks, ready for departure, not ready to learn.

This anecdote is suggestive of two things, first, that we cannot always be sure that the variety we believe to be present is experienced as variety. Secondly, only by getting feedback are we in a position to identify discrepancies between what we think we are accomplishing and the actual consequences.

Let us look at a series of alternative means for varying the stimuli:

1. Avoid stereotyped behavior, like removing and readjusting glasses, pacing back and forth, twisting at a button, or speaking invariably with the same pitch, volume, and speed. Here, a video or audio recording of one's presentation can aid in identifying such stereotypical behavior. By asking such questions as, "How

does my voice quality help students to identify major points from less important ones?", the teacher is in a position to make decisions about varying his speaking and other gestures in order to aid student learning. Subsequent video or audio recordings can help the teacher to verify that intended changes have been made.

2. Use a variety of media: overhead transparencies, 35 mm slides, 16 mm films, video tapes, etc. These can convey material directly or supplement verbal presentations.

3. Use small-group techniques within the lecture context; small groups, for instance, of three or four students each might be asked to spend a few minutes in discussion of an aspect of the material or asked to work on a problem related to it. Then, each group could report its findings to the larger body.

4. Pause in the lecture, simply to give students an opportunity to think about the material that has been presented or to summarize their notes on a particular topic, or even to relieve the fatigue of sitting by standing and stretching.

5. Use humor in a spontaneous fashion. Not only does humor provide variety within the lecture, but spontaneous humor at one's own expense demonstrates security and contributes to a warmth otherwise absent in many lecture situations. As a British philosopher has put it:

> "The great teachers are those who can conduct a shared exploration in accordance with canons, and convey, at the same time, the contagion of a shared experience in which all are united by a common zeal. That's why humor is such a valuable aid to teachers: For if people can laugh together, they step out of the shadows of self-reference cast by age, sex, and position. This creation of a shared experience can act as a catalyst which releases the class to unite in a common enterprise." (Peters, 1965)

6. Ask questions. This not only varies the stimuli, but can serve to emphasize the important points. It gives students a chance to practice with knowledge recently acquired, and can motivate students' attention.

   The lecturer might call on particular students or ask for voluntary responses. (By initiating a slightly more elaborate technique, the lecturer can both involve students through questions and get information on the effectiveness with which a point or points have been made. The lecturer might give each student four pieces of construction paper, each of a distinctively different

color. He might then ask a multiple-choice type question, requesting that the students hold up a color which corresponds with the correct answer. From the visual display which the lecturer observes, he or she can determine if the point needs clarification or re-emphasis.)

7. Let the students ask questions. Many lecturers find it desirable to take some questions during the presentation, but also to leave some time at the end of the class period to deal more thoroughly with the questions raised during the lecture or to answer additional questions.

   There will be moments when the opportunities for questions appear to be a liability. Namely, there will be instances when a student's question is not readily answerable in the time remaining, or when it calls for information that the teacher does not have immediately at her or his disposal. McKeachie (1969) has pointed out that students are not likely to feel secure enough to become independent of the lecturer as learners if the lecturer does not convey his or her own security, and admitting that one does not know the answer to a question will more likely communicate security than will any attempt to cover up.

   To supplement the in-class asking of questions, teachers have found it useful to designate a "lecture committee" which meets once per week with the instructor. One function of such a committee is to collect from their classmates questions on lecture material which can be transmitted to the lecturer to aid in her or his preparation for the next week's lectures.

   Other teachers of large lecture courses have used an automatic taping device on their office phone as a means for students to phone in questions on the material at any hour of the day or night. The teacher can review the questions and make decisions about answering them in lecture or treating them in some other way. (Wilson, 1974) (Teachers must be prepared for some "rhetorical questions" from students who call between midnight and 2:00 a.m.)

B. Making a Point

Item 17 -- "Explained course material clearly, and explanations were to the point."

1. It is important to underscore concepts or generalizations which the instructor wishes the student audience to learn. By differentiating these points from the content of the lecture which is designed to arouse interest, students will be better able to perceive and remember the important aspects or points of the lecture.

2. Limit the number of points to be covered. The difference between lecturing and writing on a topic is especially relevant to explaining course material. Unlike written exposition of a concept or generalization, a lecture must make the point in such a way that reduces the need for "re-reading" which is possible with the written text, but impossible with lecture presentations (except in rare occasions where the lecture is reprinted for the audience or is on tape). This aspect of the lecture, as a medium for learning, underscores the caution: The lecturer should undertake to present only the number of points which can be made realistically in the time available. The teacher might approach the selection of an appropriate number of points by asking, "If my students were asked what were the major points in the lecture, I would like them to reply that (...). Roughly, five such points should be made in a fifty-minute lecture period.

3. Begin with a concise statement. Bligh (1974) offers empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of a "general form" which teachers might follow in making a point. The "general form" consists of a brief/concise statement of the point, usually associating this initial statement with a visual presentation on a chalkboard or slide with the keywords in the statement. This initial expression of the point can then be re-expressed in terms other than those used for the initial statement. This will give students who might need it another way of understanding the point. For those who "got it" the first time, the repetition will be helpful to their remembering the point.

4. Elaborate on the point In the elaboration on the point, which follows in the "general form," the teacher might give more details, provide visual or verbal illustrations, explanations, and examples. An elaboration might also relate the point under consideration to others made in the course and forecast ones that will be made in the future. Examples should be expressed in concrete terms and should be brief to be functional. If the example or illustration can draw analogies to the listeners' experiences, a memorable

realism can be conveyed. For instance, if the psychology professor was talking about the desirable proximity between offering unconditioned stimuli with conditioned stimuli to produce learning, he might illustrate this point by suggesting that one should never have flowers delivered by the florist to a loved one, for the flower, as the pleasurable unconditioned stimulus, might be associated with the person delivering the flowers rather than with the sender (the conditioned stimulus).

5. Solicit feedback. The teacher then will need to know if the point has gotten across. Some of the procedures described earlier under "Varying the Stimuli" would serve to gather the information needed to determine if the point has been successfully made.

6. Summarize, recapitulate the point. Even when the teacher can judge from students' participation or questions that a point has been effectively communicated, it is advisable to sum up. A brief recapitulation of the explanation, examples, and illustrations can lead to a restatement of the point in the concise expression which began the exercise of making the point. This restatement may consolidate the learning for many, as well as give some the chance to finally see it in relationship to its elaborations.

   For making the more difficult point, special attention needs to be given to the pacing of the presentation and to the feedback from students -- feedback which makes certain they are with you at each stage in the development of that point.

7. Plan the lecture and determine the number of points to be attempted. Determining the actual number of points to be presented as well as the way in which a teacher can flexibly use the model of a "general form" are matters of experimentation for each teacher. One recommendation here is that the preparation of the lecture needs to encompass decisions on these matters. For instance, the concise statement of a point may be more difficult to construct than might be imagined, and good/concrete examples may not come to mind spontaneously with regularity.

II. Managing Lecture Content

Item 10 -- "Made it clear how each topic fit into the course."

Item 14 -- "Summarized material in a way which aided retention."

These two IDEA items are relatively straightforward and suggest the desirability of carefully organizing lecture content to make frequent reference to "the big picture" which the course is painting. After all, each lecturer must remember that the students who attend a lecture are likely to have just come away from a lecture in another "series of lectures" on another subject. Students also need these opportunities to see the distinctiveness of course elements and their relative contribution to the "big picture." Integrating course elements provides the students with a device to aid their remembering aspects of the course. Showing students how seemingly insignificant particulars fit with important thematic considerations will ease the task of learning the particulars.

A. Adopt some organizational scheme for each lecture.

In order to integrate particulars into the totality of the course, some organizational scheme needs to be selected for each class session. These organizational schemes can take a variety of formats:

1. Topical

   This approach is probably used most commonly and treats each of several parallel aspects of the course successively. Example: "There are at least three ways in which lectures might be organized: a) the topical, b) the problem-solution, and c) the chronological approaches. Let's consider the topical first . . ."

2. Problem-Solution

   A lecture might dramatize an obstacle and suggest alternative remedies. Example: "The lecturer faces the difficult task of selecting an approach to organizing the content of the lecture with the need to be sensitive to the ways in which the content is naturally divisible, as well as with a sensitivity to the ways in which students might best learn it. Let us examine the chronological (topical or problem-solution) approach to see if it might be helpful."

3. Chronological

This approach maintains a narrative quality by organizing topics in accordance with a time sequence. Example: "To choose an organizational scheme for a lecture, the instructor first needs to determine the number of main points for students' learning. Next, the lecturer might consider whether the material is more amenable to a topical, chronological, or problem-solution treatment, then . . ."

B. Make the organization of the lecture explicit.

Regardless of the organizational approach to the lecture's content, the students can be aided by making the organization explicit. The explicitness can be achieved by outlining the development of the lecture ideas on the chalkboard or through a hand-out which guides students' note-taking. The importance of the organization may stem, in part, from the students' note-taking needs, or habits. The students want to feel that their notes are inclusive of what was said. Since tape recordings of the lecture are unlikely to be available for later reference (not a bad idea though), they want to feel that the important points have been identified; points likely to comprise the tested aspects of the course content.

C. Providing students with a lecture outline may help them learn.

Students often need help to make their note-taking effective. You might want to borrow some students' lecture notes to identify any problems they may be encountering in getting the main points of your lectures. Sometimes the students' efforts to get as much of the lecture into notes, verbatim, will keep them from really listening to the lecture and from seeing the relative importance of the various points. Providing students with a lecture outline at the opening of the class, either by writing the key points on a chalkboard or printing them on a sheet of paper, can assist in keeping students' attention on the development of the ideas as well as insure that their review of class notes is organized. Their attention will then be called to the central points rather than to aspects of the content which were either intended as motivational or as elaborations on a key point.

Making lecture outlines available to students has consequences for lecture preparation, as do other of our suggestions. Namely, by taking responsibility to offer outlines to students, the teacher increases the likelihood that, in the preparation of lectures, a reasonable number of key points will be selected. In addition, there is the likelihood that the lecture outline and, therefore the lecture, will make explicit the main points and the links between one class content and the next.

III. Motivating Listeners

Item 18 -- "Related course material to real-life situations."

Item 8 -- "Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter."

Item 4 -- "Seemed enthusiastic about the subject matter."

In this paper we have offered suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of a lecture. We have assumed to this point that the teacher is both well prepared and enthusiastic about the content of the lecture. Some of the recommendations have treated the organization of content and the consequences of organization on learning. In the main, however, we have emphasized those techniques which a teacher might use to accommodate the realities of human attention spans and the factors which affect memory, and means for dealing with varying degrees of students' motivation to learn.

A. To motivate students, link course material to real-life situations.

In the section on making a point, we recommended the use of brief/concrete examples or illustrations, those which preferably link with students' experiences. There, we suggested that the concrete, personal illustration serves to increase the likelihood that a point will be remembered. We emphasize here that relating the course material to real-life situations will help you attract and maintain students' attention, setting the conditions for learning.

The importance or significance of the subject may well be communicated in terms other than its direct and immediate applicability to real-life situations. However, where the need for extrinsic motivation for learning exists (and it probably exists in some measure for each course), it is probably wise to associate the importance of the subject with some interest or need of the students.

B. Make explicit the interrelationships in course content.

Another issue treated earlier needs recapitulation with a different emphasis. We have pointed to the desirability of helping the students to see the "big picture" of the course, linking elements within and across class sessions. We inferred that such integration directly aids learning by providing a handle for students to grasp course particulars. We want to emphasize here that much of the relationship between learning and knowledge of the "big picture" may be motivational. By relating course material to real-life situations and by showing the students the relationship of particular course aspects to a greater whole, you may be providing one way for students to see the importance and significance of the subject matter and thereby motivate their attention.

Roderick Hart (1973) has summarized some factors useful for maintaining audience attention. His list expands upon and reemphasizes some of the recommendations made earlier in this paper:

Factors	Functions
Activity	Depicting elements in a state of real or imagined motion. "So now the abolitionists are coming to a showdown with the conservative congressional bloc."
Proximity	Depicting elements as being close in space or time to the listener. "So, by next year this trend could be costing you twice as much in food and rent."
Specificity	Depicting detailed aspects of an element. "Let's really get down to the causes of this physical reaction."
Intensity	Depicting interest. Be involved and enthusiastic in your topic.
Novelty	Depicting new or unusual aspects of an element.
Humor	Depicting incongruous, unexpected, juxtaposed, or familiar elements.
Realism	Depicting and emphasizing the sensory qualities of an element. "Imagine yourself as Hamlet. How does the poison feel? . . . How does it affect your speech?"
Conflict	Depicting two or more elements in opposition.
Familiarity	Depicting elements as psychologically close to listeners' past perceptions.
Suspense	Depicting an element with uncertain consequences.
Variety	Depicting a large number of apparently unassociated elements.

This listing suggests an equivalence among these factors that may be questionable. While all of these are factors which influence a listener's attention, intensity or enthusiasm may be the central ingredient in motivating listeners. The others are perhaps definitional properties or means by which the "natural" enthusiasm of a lecturer is frequently expressed.

Why make this distinction? We need to underscore that a positive relationship exists between the enthusiasm which students perceive that their lecturer exudes and their learning of the course material. In the lecture medium of teaching, the effect of enthusiasm of the lecturer on students' satisfaction and on measures of student learning cannot be overemphasized.

But what of a presumption here, that is, that teachers are responsible for motivating students to listen to their lectures? Some teachers would argue that they are not responsible to motivate students to learn but, rather, to teach motivated students a subject. On this debate we offer only the following observation: If a teacher's self-examination reveals varying degrees of interest/enthusiasm about aspects of the subject to be covered and concomitant varying degrees of excitement about lecturing on these topics, this teacher will likely be sympathetic to the moment-to-moment differences of motivation for learning in even the most highly motivated students. Such a teacher will likely want to understand those factors which will gain and hold students' attention. In planning for lectures on topics of relatively low interest to the lecturer, where enthusiasm does not come naturally, the teacher can incorporate factors which can "artifically" demonstrate enthusiasm in order to secure students' attention.

Further, the teacher who is rated low in enthusiasm might want to record lectures to see if the enthusiasm felt is being transmitted through recognizable means: suspense, variety, activity, etc. If not, perhaps the enthusiasm might better find communicable expression in more demonstrable forms.

Communicating enthusiasm is important to effective lecturing and, if the teacher is frequently unenthusiastic about the lecture's content, perhaps two kinds of questions are worth asking:

1. Why am I lecturing on a topic about which I feel relatively little interest? What are the constraints on my selection of course content which might dictate that I teach something of low interest to me? How can I alter the selection of course content to meet my interests?

2. Is it possible to lecture on those topics of greatest enthusiasm and approach other aspects of the course through different methods (e.g., guest lecturers, films, an independent study unit)?

Summary

By careful attention to planning each lecture, deciding on an appropriate number of points and a framework for developing them, by linking content to students' experiences or interest and getting feedback from students on their understanding, by offering variety and by conveying the natural enthusiasm which the lecturer feels for the subject, the lecturer may be assured that attention has been paid to some important aspects of lecturing.

Postscript

Before attempting to "lecture better," be sure that lecturing will achieve your course objectives and that the lecture approach to teaching has been adopted out of a conscious determination of its best fit with your pedagogical strengths and weaknesses, not because it is the college teaching convention.

> Just as plays and movies require casting, and not every actor is suitable for every role, so teaching methods require matching with the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher.
>
> If a teacher's personality is unsuited for lecturing, it will be much more worthwhile for him to choose a method other than lecturing than to try to learn to use the method effectively. Thus the poor lecturer, for whom lecturing would require a profound revision of personal style, should seek other methods--discussion, tutoring, individual and humanistic methods in all their many forms.
>
> (Gage and Berliner, 1975, p.526)

If lecturing is selected as the appropriate method for a course, we hope that the recommendations and observations we have made under the headings -- varying the stimuli, making a point, managing lecture content, and motivating listeners -- provide starting points for experimentation. By experimenting and monitoring results, modifications in lecturing will lead to greater student learning and to greater satisfaction for you and your students.

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